

Being MARC Savvy . . .

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In a day and age when information is so readily available, why should a library professional be interested in or familiar with MARC? The article includes a brief history of MARC as well as an overview of the structure of the MARC bibliographic record and its components. The reasons behind the benefits of being MARC savvy are also discussed.

MARC records are everywhere. They provide user access to the many treasures found in the collection and they may be found in the local online catalog or sold by vendors. MARC records are the basic language of the online catalog. Familiarity with MARC translates into a better online catalog and better records for the catalog's users.

History of MARC

What is MARC? MARC stands for **M**achine **R**eadable **C**ataloging. MARC breaks a record into smaller pieces and tells the computer how to read the record. MARC was developed in the 1960s by the Library of Congress in order to distribute cataloging records electronically and facilitate card production. MARC transforms bibliographic information into an electronic form that a computer can manipulate.

Different kinds of MARC exist. Currently, MARC21, a combination of USMARC and CANMARC (Canadian MARC), is the standard.¹ MARC formats also exist for different kinds of data such as bibliographic, authority, holdings, classification, and communications. MARC is not, however, a source of cataloging rules. Cataloging rules themselves are encompassed by the *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules*, 2d ed., 1998 revision and supplemented by the *Library of Congress Rule Interpretations*.² Finally, MARC is not limited by format of material; MARC tags can describe anything in a collection.

Overview of MARC Records Structure

MARC records contain the same information found on a catalog card, but in electronic form. See figure 1 for an example of a bibliographic record in card catalog form, and figure 2 for an example of the same bibliographic record in MARC form. Figure 2 has been taken from the Library of Congress.

The top portion of figure 2 contains the variable control fields or fixed fields (fields 000 through 008 in example). The information found in the fixed fields often varies in terminology and display from system to system.

The bottom portion of the MARC record, fields 0XX through 8XX (fields 010 through 610 in example), contains variable data fields. Here, XX represents any two of the possible digits. Variable data fields look very similar from system to system. The general variable fields are as follows:

- 0XX Control Information
- 1XX Main Entry
- 2XX Title, Statement of Responsibility, Edition, Publication Information
- 3XX Physical Description
- 4XX Series Statement(s)
- 5XX Notes
- 6XX Subject Headings
- 7XX Added Entries Other Than Subjects
- 8XX Series Added Entries

Figure 1
Bibliographic Record in Card Catalog Form

B Gutman, Bill.
J765g Teammates : Michael Jordan, Scottie Pippen / Bill Gutman. -- Brookfield, Conn. : Millbrook Press, c1998.
 112 p. : ill. ; 24 cm.
 Summary: A dual biography of two star players for the Chicago Bulls, describing their separate basketball careers and how they have performed as teammates.
 Includes index.
 0761304207 (lib. bdg.)

 1. Jordan, Michael, 1963- --Juvenile literature.
 2. Pippen, Scottie--Juvenile literature.
 3. Basketball players--United States--Biography--Juvenile literature.
 4. Chicago Bulls (Basketball team)--Juvenile literature. I. Title. II. Michael Jordan and Scottie Pippen.

Figure 2
Bibliographic Record in MARC

000	01610cam 2200397 a 450
001	4031741
005	19990218152735.4
008	980211s1998 ctua c 001 Obeng
010	\$a 98003030
020	\$a 0761304207 (lib. bdg.)
040	\$a DLC \$c DLC \$d DLC
043	\$a n-us--- \$a n-us-il
050 00	\$a GV884.J67 \$b G888 1998
082 00	\$a 796.323/092/277311 \$a B \$2 21
100 1_	\$a Gutman, Bill.
245 10	\$a Teammates : \$b Michael Jordan, Scottie Pippen / \$c Bill Gutman.
246 3_	\$a Michael Jordan and Scottie Pippen
260	\$a Brookfield, Conn. : \$b Millbrook Press, \$c c1998.
300	\$a 112 p. : \$b ill. ; \$c 24 cm.
520	\$a A dual biography of two star players for the Chicago Bulls, describing their separate basketball careers and how they have performed as teammates.
500	\$a Includes index.
600 10	\$a Jordan, Michael, \$d 1963- \$v Juvenile literature.
600 10	\$a Pippen, Scottie \$v Juvenile literature.
650 _0	\$a Basketball players \$z United States \$v Biography \$v Juvenile literature.
610 20	\$a Chicago Bulls (Basketball team) \$v Juvenile literature.

A useful mnemonic device in MARC is its parallel content in the variable data fields. Parallel content means the same type of information appears in a field whether it is the main entry, subject entry, or added entry, even though the hundreds number of the tag differs. For example, the last two digits in the MARC tag for a personal name will always be 00 whether the name is a main entry (100), a subject entry (600), or an added entry (700). The fields with parallel content are also the fields that require authority work.³ These fields are:

- X00 Personal Names
- X10 Corporate Names
- X11 Conference and Meeting Names
- X30 Uniform Titles
- X40 Bibliographic Titles
- X50 Topical Terms
- X51 Geographic Names

What Components Comprise a MARC Bibliographic Record?

MARC records are comprised of the leader, directory, and variable fields. The leader is the first twenty-four characters of a record (00–23) and is used exclusively by the computer. The directory tells the computer what tags are being used and where they are located. The directory, like the leader, is used exclusively by the computer.

The variable fields, fields 0XX–8XX, contain recognizable cataloging data such as is found in figure 1. Within the variable fields, there are a number of smaller pieces. The following example illustrates the smaller pieces using the title information.

- **Fields** are specific, related elements of a bibliographic record often with more than one subfield.
245 10 \$a Teammates : \$b Michael Jordan, Scottie Pippen / \$c Bill Gutman.
- **Subfields** are smaller portions of a field.
245 10 \$a Teammates : \$b Michael Jordan, Scottie Pippen / \$c Bill Gutman.
- **Tags** are three-digit numbers assigned to a particular field.

245 10 \$a Teammates : \$b Michael Jordan. Scottie Pippen / \$c Bill Gutman.

- **Indicators** are the two character positions (values between 0 and 9) that follow each tag. Indicators can mean a variety of things depending on the tag. The first indicator in the 245 field tells whether the item is a main or added entry. The second indicator in the 245 field tells how many characters the computer must skip in order to avoid filing under nonfiling characters. Indicators can also generate print constants in certain fields.

245 10 \$a Teammates : \$b Michael Jordan, Scottie Pippen / \$c Bill Gutman.

- **Delimiters** show a new subfield. Different library catalogs have different ways of representing this. Some of the more common ones are \$, ‡, _, etc.

245 10 \$a Teammates : \$b Michael Jordan, Scottie Pippen / \$c Bill Gutman.

Format Integration and Its Impact

Most library media specialists (LMS) have probably heard the phrase "format integration," but what does it mean and how does it impact the LMS? Prior to format integration (1995), certain tags were restricted or forbidden for use with certain formats. With format integration, all tags are now valid for use with all bibliographic formats.

Format integration simplified MARC. It also made it possible to describe items that include elements of more than one format (e.g., a book with an accompanying CD-ROM). Before format integration, one was forced to catalog the item either as a book or as computer software.

Some of the tag changes since format integration include: 006 for additional material characteristics added; 246 for varying form of title (previously field 740) added; removal of the indicators in field 260. Other fields were eliminated or limited: removal of field 265; field 740 added entry—uncontrolled related/analytical title refined.

Being MARC Savvy

Being MARC savvy or familiar with MARC allows library media specialists to assess the quality of

the records the vendor or bibliographic utility provides. Is the vendor or bibliographic utility providing correct, error-free records? "Dirty" records create problems for both the library media specialist and library users when searching the online catalog. In a union catalog, dirty records become an even bigger problem in terms of corrections to be made in both the local online catalog and the union catalog.

A second reason to be MARC savvy is that MARC records are not always readily available for all items. What happens when a great video recording arrives and no MARC copy is available? Access to the item must still be provided in the catalog for it to be of real use to patrons. Familiarity with MARC will assist in the creation of original records for the online catalog.

Being MARC savvy also affects catalog maintenance. A basic familiarity with the MARC record will help correct and/or enhance records. How does one fix the MARC record for an item that has an incorrect element in the fixed field, forcing it to display in the online catalog as a microform when it is really a book? What needs to be adjusted when the title of a book appears in the catalog under the word "the"? Being familiar with the basic MARC record structure, fields, subfields, indicators, and codes will facilitate making repairs with confidence. Items previously lost online due to an error in MARC tagging can now be found.

A fourth reason for being MARC savvy is to make record enhancements for users. Contents notes (505 field), summary notes (520 field), audience notes (521 field), study program notes (526 field), award notes (586 field), curriculum objectives (658 field), and electronic location and access (856 field) allowing the user to move from the catalog to an Internet resource are just a few of the possible enhancements. Not only do these fields provide users with additional, relevant information, they also strengthen the ties between the library media center and the curriculum.

One of the final arguments for being familiar with MARC is the need to understand the importance of being MARC-compatible versus MARC-tolerant. While this may appear to be splitting hairs, it can save everyone from future woes. Are there intentions to stay with the current library system forever? Probably not. Being

MARC savvy and making sure the catalog records are MARC-compatible mean that the online catalog will experience far fewer problems if, or when, the library system changes.

Walt Crawford states, "A fully compatible format is one that can accept pure USMARC records and regenerate them without loss of data or content designation . . ." ⁴ MARC-compatible records contain MARC fields with certain standard elements that can be transferred without loss of information. Some vendors sell "MARC-tolerant" records rather than MARC-compatible records. Being MARC savvy ensures that the vendor is providing compatible MARC records.

In summary, being MARC savvy helps both the library media specialist and users. Although we live in an age where vendors and bibliographic utilities provide the vast majority of MARC records, being MARC savvy assists library media specialists in creating original cataloging records, maintaining the online catalog, and evaluating the quality of records provided by the bibliographic utility or vendor. ●

References

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